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perhaps a dozen years ago, but I know not whether his observations are published, except by a brief allusion in the Gardeners' Chronicle. He found, as did Mr. Millington, that while the bristles will close upon a bit of raw meat, they are not sensitive to an inorganic body; yet that they are so to a bit of carbonate of ammonia. Mr. Darwin followed up this subject by some very interesting observations and experiments upon the Venus Fly-trap, *Dionea*, which, with some recent ones made in this country, may soon be published. — A. GRAY.

FLOWERING OF HEPATICA TRILOBA. — March 12th, I found three *Hepaticas* in blossom, and on March 29th, I gathered quite a handful. — J. H. SEARS, *Danvers, Mass.*

ZOOLOGY.

INSTANCES OF ALBINISM AMONG OUR BIRDS. — In a recent number of the NATURALIST, a correspondent mentions a "Singular Variety" of the Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). His specimen is an example of the partial albinism which is, perhaps, not so rare among birds as it is generally supposed to be. When we remember what an extremely small percentage of individuals of any species comes under observation, the wonder rather is, that so many albinos are found. In the course of a few seasons' collecting, I have met with the following instances of albinism, partial or complete.

Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*). A specimen shot in the fall has the wings and tail mostly white, and all the upper parts patched here and there with white.

Western Snow-bird (*Junco Oregonus*). A specimen shot at Fort Whipple, Arizona, Dec. 12, 1864, has a large, somewhat circular, pure white spot on the throat, distinctly defined against the surrounding dark colors. The plumage is otherwise perfectly normal.

Blue bird (*Sialia sialis*). A curious specimen, with a triangular white spot on the back of the neck; otherwise perfectly normal in plumage. I have seen this species entirely snow-white, with (probably) pink eyes, and flesh-colored bill and feet.

Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). With a large white spot on each side of the head, formed by the enlargement and coalescence of the white spots which occur normally about the eyes. The robin also occurs in snow-white plumage.

Bank Swallow (*Cotyle riparia*). With the upper parts delicate pale silvery gray; the under parts pure white, as usual. This is the only instance I have met with of albinism in this bird.

Blue Yellow-backed Warbler (*Parula Americana*). This is, in some respects, the most curious example of partial albinism I have ever seen, occurring in a family of birds little liable to this abnormality. The entire plumage is mottled and patched with white, the natural colors appearing in the spaces between the white areas.

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Dendroeca coronata*). All the slate and blackish colors are replaced by dull silvery gray.

The common Quail (*Ortyx Virginiana*) is occasionally found with all the tints so light, dull, and faded as to fairly be considered albinotic. There is a specimen in this condition in the Smithsonian Institution. Crows and Blackbirds seem, to judge from the frequency of the occurrence of albinos, to be particularly liable to this aberration in color. The expression, "a white blackbird" is hardly so paradoxical as it might seem; and indicates as well established a fact as that "blackberries are red when they are green."

The Black Guillemot (*Uria grylle*), and the Sea-dove (*Mergulus alle*), are both very obnoxious to albinism; and, in fact, each has been described in this condition as a distinct species. But the albinotic condition of the Black Guillemot must not be confounded with its normal winter plumage, which is nearly white. The albino has no black whatever about it; the eyes are pink, and the bill and feet flesh-colored.

The question of albinism among the large Gulls of the genus *Larus*, possesses unusual interest. The study of this condition among these birds is more than a matter of simple curiosity; having important bearing upon the validity of at least one of our accredited American species (*L. Hutchinsii* Richardson). Numerous authors speak of a "pure-white Gull," and several specific names have been based upon such a condition of plumage. The bird referred to is about the size of, or rather smaller than the Burgomaster (*L. glaucus*). If it is really a valid species, it would constitute the only known exception to the rule, that all the true *Lari* have the back and wings darker than the under parts.

The Philadelphia Academy has a fine albino Giant Petrel (*Ossifraga gigantea*). This is pure white, patched here and there with isolated blackish feathers. In the Smithsonian Institution there is a perfect albino Red-throated Diver (*Colymbus septentrionalis*). It is nearly snow-white, with pink eyes and flesh-colored bill and feet.

The opposite of albinism — *Melanism* — is an extremely rare condition. At this moment I can recall but a single instance of its occurrence. This is the Black Guillemot, which is occasionally found without a trace of white upon or under the wings. In this state it has been described as a distinct species (*Uria "unicolor"*). — DR. ELLIOTT COUES, U. S. A.

RETURN OF THE BIRDS. — The following birds, which left for their southern quarters about November last, returned to the vicinity of Danvers, Mass., in numbers, at the dates given:

Wild Geese passed to the northward February 26; Black-ducks, Robins, Red-shouldered Hawks, Blue-jays arrived March 2; Cedar-birds, Gold-finches, Lesser Red-poll Linnets, March 4; Star-breasted Larks, Woodcocks, March 8; Golden-winged Woodpeckers, Purple Finches, Bluebirds, March 12; Red-winged Blackbirds, Swamp Sparrows, Yellow-winged Sparrows, March 15; Common Pewees, Marsh Hawks, March 25; Wood-ducks, Crow Blackbirds, March 26; White-bellied Swallows (four specimens), March 27. — J. H. SEARS, *Danvers*.